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The Prohibited Comedy.

RICHELIEU IN LOVE ;

OR,

THE YOUTH OF CHARLES I.

An Historical Comedy.

IN THREE ACTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS." &c.

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AS PERFORMED AT

THE THEATRE ROYAL, HAYMARKET,

OCTOBER 30TH, 1852.

LONDON :

CHARLES WESTERTON,

(WESTERTON'S LIBRARY.)

20, ST. GEORGE'S PLACE, HYDE PARK CORNER.

1852.

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PRICE ONE SHILLING.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ



- Louis XIII*, King of France, MR. HOWE.
Prince Charles, MR. PARSELLE.
Duke of Buckingham, MR. LEIGH MURRAY.
Cardinal Richelieu, MR. WEBSTER.
Lord Herbert of Cherbury, MR. JAMES BLAND;
Joseph, a Monk, MR. ROGERS.
Mignon, a young Page, MRS. L. S. BUCKINGHAM.
- Queen Anne d'Autriche*, MRS. STIRLING.
Princess Henriette, MISS AMELIA VINING.
Countess le Dragon, MRS. SELBY.

Lords, Soldiers, Tapsters and other Attendants.

The Scene is at Paris.

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TO

BENJAMIN WEBSTER, Esq.

MY DEAR SIR,

I dedicated this Piece to you, at a period when its misfortunes rendered it an additional act of generous consideration on your part, to accept the dedication. And now, raised as it were from the dead, and indebted to yourself in so large a measure for the brilliant vitality with which it has been endowed, I inscribe "Richelieu in Love" to you again, with a pleasure that lifts the weight of the long injustice under which it has suffered, from my heart. Your liberal and devoted labours in the service of the National Drama—unostentatious as the utmost simplicity of private life, but princely in munificence and impartiality of encouragement—entitle you to a more honourable public acknowledgment. But meanwhile let me offer th sincerest tribute of admiration to your powers as an artist, and thanks for your zealous and unwearied protection of a work which at all times needed it so much, from the

AUTHOR OF "RICHELIEU IN LOVE."

9th October, 1852.

PREAMBLE.

It is a pleasant task to congratulate after a victory!— But a general who knows that, with little skill or strategy of his own, his army has achieved him a triumph, is doubly bound to issue a bulletin of acknowledgment. The Author is as well aware as the profoundest of his critics, how much the success of “Richelieu in Love” is due to the extraordinary exertions and admirable talent of the principal impersonators of the drama. That original and powerful conception and grasp of character, which enabled Mr. Webster to elaborate a faint sketch of the great Cardinal into an historical portrait, worthy to be placed in the choicest gallery of dramatic creations—the fascinating grace, the indescribable charm of wit and beauty which Mrs. Stirling shed like a sparkling light over the entire drama—the comic unction of Mrs. Selby’s Countess Le Dragon—the mercurial vivacity of Mr. Leigh Murray in the part of the Duke of Buckingham—the elegance and sentiment of Miss A. Vining and Mr. Parselle, in parts which allowed no other scope to their abilities—the sombre, Velasquez hues of Mr. Howe’s Louis XIII., which deepened by contrast all the brighter tints around him—the boyish

levity and sprightliness of Mrs. Buckingham's page—all were necessary, I admit, my dear Critics! to produce the effect which, at all events, however differing as to the means, you seem pretty unanimously agreed, we have produced.

One ought not to quarrel on minor details when the general result is so satisfactory. It could not be expected that men who judge so much from the standard of their own *exquisite performances*, should be altogether favourable to the first attempt of a young writer! Had "Richelieu in Love" been translated from the French, into sufficiently ungrammatical and commonplace English, I own, it would have been more worthy of the critical approbations withheld. Yet the prescient sagacity which, a full week before performance, foresaw that it would be necessary "to scarify" *Richelieu in Love*, surely somewhat exceeded the fair limits even of professional insight! But in this instance, as in others, malice has over-REACH-ed *himself*!

RICHELIEU IN LOVE ;

OR,

THE YOUTH OF CHARLES I.

The passages distinguished by inverted commas, are omitted in representation.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.

A room in the Lys d'Or. PRINCE CHARLES and BUCKINGHAM at a table spread with fruit and wine.

Buckingham. Well, of all the inventions to waste man's brief little candle of life, travelling is the dullest—excepting matrimony.

Prince Charles. Does matrimony waste time? I thought you gallants considered it rather as a pastime?

Buckingham. O, question unlearned! does rust eat iron? First, there's the courtship: a good six months' sighing, fretting, doubting, hoping, quarrelling, reconciling; "your long reveries, your fine conclusions on every smile, look, word;" your sad contemplations, wherein a man stands musing like a drowsy crane, he knows not why nor wherefore!—Then, after all, when the celestial piece of clay is wooed and won, what a dreary many hours doth the happiest of men (as he is technically called) spend repenting him, "and rubbing the sprouts of his horns!"

Prince Charles. "I trow me thou hast graced stately heads with some such seemly additions." Look that thou never marry, for the gods are just.

Buckingham. Good sooth, I shall not, till 'tis the fashion to wear high hoods, "or till I have won laurels to wreath my branches out of sight." But how sounds such counsel from your grace, who are on your way to marry a Spanish infanta?

Prince Charles. I am not married yet.

Buckingham. Would I could hear you say so at threescore! What a life could we lead in England: rich, young, jovial, and bachelors!

Prince Charles. And why not in Paris, while we are here?

Buckingham. By Jove, we will, despite the pestilent terrors of my Lord Herbert, with his stiff reasons of state, and uncongenial moralities! Who will look for the King of England's heir, and merry George of Bucks, under the sober mantles of two chevaliers errant? But your cup is empty, Charles; fill up, my hearty. Merry when we may, sad when we must! Here's to Madam Eastcheap, my fat city conquest! Poor soul, I left her weeping like buttered ven'son before a brisk fire, "and protesting she would ne'er tie on her garters but she would think of me."

Prince Charles. Madam Eastcheap, then!—But, George, I marvel what hath detained his good Lordship of Cherbury?—I am curious to see the French court, and this masked ball is a propitious chance. He is to get us admittance as simple chevaliers of his train.

Buckingham. Simple enough, good troth; but some are wiser than their looks. "There are who have fished for gudgeon in the Nile, and have caught crocodiles!"—Heigho, how dull a festal table is, unlighted by the sun of beauty!

Enter a TAPSTER.

Tapster. Milors, a cavalier; un Anglois in long manteau, come to saluer, to kiss your seigneuries.

Buck. I hope he is shaved, then. Show him in. Cherbury, I suppose?—old stiff-neck, in truth. My Lord, your humblest servant.

Enter LORD HERBERT OF CHERBURY, followed by two attendants.

Lord H. Sirs, you may retire. (*Exeunt attendants.*) Your Highness's proudest subject!—My Lord of Buckingham, I change titles with you.

Buck. I thank you, my Lord; you will gain by the change, for though mine be something older, 'tis none the worse for wear.

Lord H. Nor mine, I trust!

Prince C. "Tut—gentlemen, what wrangling is this?" You forget, Cherbury, we have no names in Paris but those of Stuart and Villiers.

Buck. I would we had none worse in London!

Lord H. Amen!—I play but clerk to the prayer for this, that a good reputation keeping company with a bad, like a sound apple packed among rotten, smells something musty for the neighbourhood. “For the rest, I care not.”

“*Buck.* Nor I: it all comes to the same thing, if chronicles lie not. Merry is as good a word in an epitaph as sad, and a better to live by.”

Lord H. “I quarrel with no man’s humour, that crosses not mine.” My Prince, here are the golden cheques of admittance to this royal mask;—but again I would warn your grace of the danger you run. A discovery would ruin all your great father’s plans!—for I doubt—I doubt!—if the French court would lose such a chance of breaking this dreaded alliance with the Spaniard. You run marvellous risk!

Buck. Not a whit, not a whit! Tut, would you keep us here yawning all night?

Lord H. There are pleasures in Paris, my Lord, less perilous.

“*Buck.* And know you not, though ’tis reported your reading lies in a contrary direction, there was but one fruit forbidden in Paradise? I am of Eve’s sons; I will not deny my grandmother, like a span-new Lord who knows her for an oyster-wench.”

Prince C. I wish to see the French court, Cherbury.

Buck. And I am determined to see this fair Queen of France, whose beauty and sparkling wit are themes on which admiration wags her tongue incessantly as a field of grasshoppers.

Lord H. Beware, my Lord Duke!—these bright lights but lure butterflies to burn their wings.

Buck. “My Lord of Cherbury was always more famous for giving than taking counsel.” So I find the light brilliant, I will but warm me, and fly away.

Lord H. You shall do well, albeit with singed legs.

P. Charles. The Queen is then as lovely as report, the aërial painter, shapes her?

Lord H. None fairer sir; “a poet that loved, could not dream her lovelier;” moreover, of a most snowy and unspotted fame, even in this mad court of France, “though something blamed for that her sweet majesty doth at times rather remember that she is a lovely woman than a great Queen.”

Buck. I’ll see her, though I die for it!

Lord H. And yet, for all her goodness, they say the King is

is jealously inclined. Look to it, Duke! irresolute and melancholy as he seems in general, he hath at times a sudden and a bloody hand!

Buck. Oh, a husband?—that is nothing: have I no rival to dread?

Lord H. What deem you, my Lord, of such a rival as the potent Cardinal himself, the terrible Richelieu? "'Tis rumoured in the court, that he something affects her Majesty's good graces."

Buck. "But affects she his?" O, my Lord Herbert, you philosophers understand all almanacks but Love's—roses are not blown by old Christmas's frosty breath! Mind you not the refrain?
(Sings.)

"For blossomy May mates not
With leafless January,
Nor a budding maid should bloom
On an old man's breast, my Mary!"

Lord H. I take marvellous comfort, my Lord of Bucks, from the consideration that, being masked, you will scarce be able to select her Majesty as the object of your presumptuous imprudence.

Buck. Oh, I shall discover her by her graces, as ye find the hidden violet by its sweet smell.

Enter TAPSTER, with wine.

Prince C. Come, my friends, let us drown bickerings in a full goblet. "Ye both love me after your several fashions, and I will requite you after mine." Fill up, we will drink to all our good success.

Lord H. I drink heartily to your Highness's success.

Buck. And I to mine own!—But I will give your grace a toast which even my Lord Herbert's Welsh gentility will scarce refuse:—To the fair Queen of France!

Lord H. Heaven forbid! 'Tis now my turn, and I will pledge your Highness to the health of a most royal and fair damsel—the Princess Henriette Marie!

Buck. Marry, and save us!

Prince C. Is the lady so handsome and sprightly as fame reports her?

Lord H. She betters her report, whate'er it be, sir; "and, moreover, is of a right royal and courageous temper."

Buck. Wears she petticoats?—if not, take care of your heart, my Prince.

Prince C. Why, faith, an she were to my liking, I would not cross the Pyrenees for a wife. You say she is fair?

Buck. If she be black, it matters not, for we are bound not to fall in love till we get to Madrid, where we are to be desperately enamoured, according to treaty.

Prince C. Truce to thy jests, Buckingham. My Lords, time is getting into his dark corners, and we should be in preparation. Empty your goblets, and we'll go mask. "I will give one more toast, and then away." After all's said and done—the Women of England for ever!

Buck. And a—night! (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

A grand hall in the Louvre, richly illuminated and festively adorned. Courtiers sumptuously attired and masked, parading; with them, also masked, are the KING, the QUEEN, the PRINCESS HENRIETTE, RICHELIEU, LE DRAGON. Music; a ballet. Enter a group of Spanish Villagers who dance a Moresco with castanets, alternately pursuing. The women are dancing off, when enter a flight of Cupids with chains of flowers, in which they entangle the dancers. Enter, meeting them, CHARLES, BUCKINGHAM, and LORD HERBERT.

Buck. Tarry, sweet loves! Whither away?

Mignon (disguised as a cupid.) Why hath Love wings if not to fly away when he is tired?

Buck. Methinks, next to his blindness, they are his best attribute. But lend me your wreath, Cupid! when Love is gone, alas, he leaves his chains behind him.

Queen A. But they are of roses, cavaliers.

Buck. Sweet Mask, feel though, if they are not heavy! (*throws the chain over her.*) And now I have caught you, by St. George, I will not let you go till you have danced a saraband with me.

Queen A. You are an Englishman by your impudence.

Buck. And so escaped being an ox, as a Frenchman escapes being a monkey. Sweet prisoner, pardon me, and dance but one measure in assurance of forgiveness.

Queen A. That were a measure against my inclinations, for I will dance three or four with so marvellous a novelty.

(*Gives her hand, they pass on.*)

King L. Richelieu, which is the Queen?—Methinks she hath purposely disguised herself to elude mine eye.

Riche. I recognize her not, sire.

King L. Go not far from us, Richelieu, to-night; we are something sad amidst this revelry; why need these lying faces wear masks? "What is a courtier's else?"

Riche. Something superfluous, indeed, my liege; whatever man hath beyond the beast, is so.

King L. What an opportunity were this masque, cardinal, an we were not loved, for some treacherous murderer to glide in, and stab us unprepared, like our great father, in the rank blossom of our sins.

Riche. Sire!

King L. Truly, cardinal, since we last held a revelry in these halls, you have thinned the ranks of our nobles. Last month, there were some danced here, Montmorenci of the number—whose heads are now blackening on their castle gates.

Riche. In sooth, sire, I have lopped the tall poppies. But give not way to overweening sadness; join in the revelry, and mock the prying eyes of suspicion with a smile.

King L. Cardinal, I am heart-sick of smiles! You ever make me smile on those whom you have marked for the knife. Farewell awhile; look to the Queen, she is young and light of . . . of heart. Lords, a hall, a hall! (*Music.*)

Riche. He is jealous . . . would he had such cause as I would give him! Who is this? Le Dragon, by her ill gait. Madame!

Le Drag. Monseigneur?

Riche. What subtle disguise hath the Queen assumed to-night, that none can recognise her?

Le Drag. She is there, in the white simar with diamond aiguillets.

Riche. What, in conversation with yonder fantastically dressed peacock in cramoisy velvet?

Le Drag. And in very close conversation, too.

Riche. Ah, indeed! (*dives into the crowd and is seen to approach the Queen.*)

PRINCE CHARLES and LORD HERBERT pass.

Prince C. 'Tis a brilliant court, indeed, and belies not its fame. I would we recognised the persons, though. Look yonder! Buckingham hath mated himself.

Lord H. It should then be with a female cuckoo, my lord.

Prince C. You love him not, Cherbury.

Lord H. Nor any man that loves your grace's honour better than your pleasure. Does your Highness dance to-night?

Prince C. Nay, methinks I will play stiff-ankled age, and be of the lookers-on.

Lord H. "See you none among these fair be vies worthy to foot a measure with your Grace?"

Prince C. "Ay, and with Apollo's self, yet none I care to join. Venus and her waiting graces would not tempt me, for I am of a laggard blood; and" yet, by'r lady! look there! what lady is that who rests like a seraph asleep on yonder couch?

Lord H. I know not, though methinks I should remember her form—'tis beautiful.

Prince C. The word sounds poor as when men say of the sun—'tis bright! Prithee, Cherbury, tarry awhile; I must take a nearer survey of this most finished sculpture of nature. (*Passes over to PRINCESS HENRIETTE. He is seen to salute and enter into conversation with her.*)

Marshals. A hall, a hall, Lords!

(*Music; a stately dance. QUEEN dances with BUCKINGHAM, CHARLES with the PRINCESS, LORD HERRERT with MME. LE DRAGON.*)

King L. Lords, to the banquet: I am weary of this. Where is the Queen?

Le Drag. It is her Grace's pleasure to unmask at the banquet.

King L. Follow me then, my lords; you know your own precedence.

(*PAGES with torches. Doors thrown open revealing the grand staircase of the Louvre. Exeunt KING and COURT.*)

Buck. Deign, sweet perfection, to glorify my arm by accepting it as your prop.

Queen A. By no means; I must hence and change my dress for the banquet. There is a personage, Monsieur, who would not greatly exult to recognise me in a garb which has fluttered all the evening near so gallant a cavalier. Follow me not—Adieu!

Buck. By St. George, I will not say that word till to-morrow—*(aside)* and then very heartily!

Queen A. Sir, if you are a hunter, you have mistaken your game. Prithee, leave me, we shall be observed.

Buck. Observe who will, loveliest! I am content to be caught in the net, if Venus be my fellow prisoner.

Queen A. You come of an impudent family, I conjecture, cavalier.

Buck. Originally French, Madam.

Queen A. Your name, if your mother forgot not to put a handle on you; and have you any business in existence, or are nothing—I mean a gentleman?

Buck. My name is Villiers, and I am nothing—but what you please to make me.

Queen A. I thought you were a gardener by your flowery similes.

Buck. And so I am, sweet mask, in human flowers!—Set a parterre of lovely women before me, and I will cull a nosegay which the Grand Signor might envy. Your fair maidens are my lilies, your beautiful fragrant women my roses, your bashful tender rogues my violets, and yourself—oh! there's no flower to be compared to you.

Queen A. Oh, but there is. What say you to a nettle bloom in a hedge of briars?

Buck. Pluck boldly, and they will not sting. Off, envious mask!

Queen A. Away! What mean you; to insult me?

Buck. Insult you! I would fight a duel with myself if I dared. But why this trepidation, dearest lady?—Does the expression of my passionate admiration excite fear? Ah, madam, there is such majesty mingled with your beauty, like heat in flame, that—

Queen A. That like a foolish child, you would burn your fingers? But this is folly, and moreover, I shall be missed. What inference would malice put on our simultaneous absence, think you?

Buck. Then may we not as well eat the peach, as be whipped for it uneaten?

Queen A. Hist, a step!

Buck. I fear nothing.

Queen A. Very possibly: you are a man and may brave the

world. I am unfortunately a woman, and must study its looks as a slave his master's. You men can polish up your reputations like your rusty swords; but women's, once breathed on, are dimmed for ever, like flawed diamonds. Pray you, sir, leave me, I am closely watched.

Buck. If I left you, I should leave my soul behind me; and what were a man without a soul?

Queen Anne. Why, first cousin to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand he met. But pray you, *Sieur*, is it an English custom to talk such wild nonsense to every woman one dances with?

Buck. No, my lovely mask, not to every woman—

Queen A. Hark! some one comes.

Buck. "He is then predestined to be hanged in his own scarf."

Queen A. "I rather fear that fate for yourself, my brave cavalier."

Buck. "Is it held so criminal in a court so famous for its mild morality, to worship beauty like that which hears me?"

Queen A. "The offence is small; but what if the offended be great? It were a light crime to kill a cat; but to pull the lion's beard is another affair. Besides, you say I am beautiful: how know you that? I may be the ugliest old woman living."

Buck. "This mellifluous voice which subdues my soul, this sculptured form, this soft hand which trembles in mine, can they belong to aught but the loveliest youth?" Keep me no longer languishing! let me behold that fairest face, and it shall be my Heaven to remember it for ever.

Queen A. Well, sir, do you know me? (unmasks.)

Buck. Oh, thou breathing rose! I surrender myself thy slave now, and for ever!

Queen A. Arise, arise! you are too deeply studied in romances. So, you know me not, and I resume my mask.

Buck. It is a cloud before the sun, and darkens all things

Queen A. But my blushes being thus excused, I can freely tell you my thoughts on—

Buck. Am I indeed so blest as to —

Queen A. On your countrymen in general.

Buck. Hang my countrymen!

Queen A. I have no objection—except the married.

Buck. Why them? I am not married.

Queen A. Because they—would hang themselves!

Buck. “Your wit equals your beauty, as the fragrance of the rose its colour; but let not your cruelty be like its thorns.”

Queen A. “A rose without thorns were easily gathered, and thrown away, too.”

Buck. “But in spite of these same thorns—”

Queen A. If you desire not to irritate me for ever, leave this space between us!—Fate has placed another and an impassable barrier.

Buck. Love laughs at barriers, lady; he has wings to fly over them! “But what crime were it to snatch but one rose from that ever-budding bower, your cheek?”

Queen A. “’Tis theft but to pluck a berry from another’s bush.”

Buck. But what fear you, that the celestial bloom wavers on your complexion like flame on snow? What ruffian could approach you with aught but adoration?”

Queen A. “Oh, I do not expect to be beaten—the days of the giants are over, when they used to thrash princesses into yielding, like corn. Now-a-days they lure, not drag them to their ruin;—being just such smooth, complaisant, cozening knaves as—but you islanders readily take offence.”

Buck. “Never spoke offence with so musical a tongue!”

Queen A. “And then, though heretics, you are very Jesuits in love.” But I am mad to linger thus. “Who knows but that some of the hundred eyes of jealousy or envy may have watched us?—And courtiers seldom tack a good motive to an equivocal action.”

Buck. “The severest will not blame me for snatching a few minutes’ heaven in your society.”

Queen A. “Especially as I suppose it is the only one you gallant gentlemen ever reach. But saints win their crowns by all imaginable miseries. St. Laurence was broiled into heaven on a gridiron and—if ever you wish to see me again, leave me now!”

Buck. But tell me at least who and what you are, that I may not think I have dreamed some unreal vision of bliss.

Queen A. Let this suffice—I am of her majesty’s chamber.

Buck. Would I were the Queen!

Queen A. Rather the King, chevalier!

Buck. But if you are wedded, to whom, to whom?

Queen A. A jealous gentleman. Our Lady!—here are steps : begone, begone, “if you love me.”

Buck. I obey ; but grant me one little pledge of friendship : this rose from your bosom, made fragrant by resting there.

Queen A. Ah, no, do not kneel—rise, rise ! here is the rose ! You will ruin me.

Buck. A pledge of love and constancy !

Queen A. A pledge of folly and impudence !—Surely I should know that cautious, lordly figure ?—(*aside.*) Ah, the good cardinal is seldom off my traces.

Enter RICHELIEU, masked.

Riche. A fair even to you, masks.

Buck. (aside.) The devil take him !—Good even, sir,—are you better, madam ?

Queen A. Much, I thank you, courteous mask.

Riche. I believe I have the honour to know this lady.—Am I mistaken, madam ?

Queen A. You know best.

Riche. Do you not recognise me ?

Queen A. The infallible head of the church might be excused, if he failed to recognise in this glittering mummery, the—

Riche. Pardon me, lady, I perceive you recognise me.

Queen A. But the use of knowledge is to communicate it.

Riche. Under that persuasion, I am come to inform you, madam, that your absence is observed by your friends, and may soon be so by your enemies.

Queen A. But how have I displeased friends or enemies, by leaving a burning atmosphere for a cool one ?

Riche. Did you leave it alone ?

Queen A. Nearly : this gentleman was kind enough to lend me his arm.

Riche. Indeed ! The gentleman is marvellously civil, and very well made. You keep your mask well on, sir.

Buck. It covers an honest face—which all masks do not.

Riche. True, or mask-makers would starve. I have seen but one in my time, and that was in a mirror.

Queen A. Can you counterfeit so well as to deceive yourself ?—Why, to believe you, honesty is as scarce as meekness in churchmen, or faith in politicians.

Riche. Or constancy in women !—But methinks, lady, you

waste the arrows of your wit on a brace of solitary birds. Return where the flock is assembled, and if you shoot at random, so that your shafts can pierce folly or vice, you can never miss.

Queen A. "But if all ill qualities be centred in one, and he at hand?"

Riche. "You are too severe on the gentleman."—O, sir, 'tis dangerous to soar to these great heights!—The vulture and the falcon sail midway between heaven and earth; and woe to the ambitious jackdaw that soars into their aërie! What deem you, lady?

Queen A. That it is time to separate, since we are growing quarrelsome. The King had not entered when you left, sir?

Riche. No madam, but the Queen had retired. Her grace is so uninitiated in the manners of the French court, that she withdrew at a moment when all eyes were upon her, for the signal to unmask.

Queen A. "'Twere tragical, should some smother!" Perchance the Queen will dispense with the ceremony altogether, I heard her say as much: should you deem that a strange caprice?

Riche. No, madam, her grace is a woman.

Queen A. Priests have not the monopoly of all human failings, Heaven be praised! May I ask, sir, if you have lately been in contact with the venerable Cardinal Richelieu, whose caustic malignancy, like alum, embitters all it touches?

Riche. When I came to this gorgeous festival, I left the *Cardinal* at home, madam.

"*Queen A.* You did well: yet they say he is as seldom found there as at mass. But tell me, is it true that the *Cardinal* is growing deaf?"

"*Riche.* A man needs be deaf and blind, too, madam, in the French court: but I never heard the *Cardinal* was either. People act though as if he were both."

Queen A. (*Aside*) I must rid myself of one of them. (*Music behind Scenes.*) Hark! surely her majesty has returned! I would I knew, for if she is indisposed, I must to her bed-chamber. Monsieur with the golden feather, may I beg you to go and learn?

Buch. I am proud to obey you, noble lady. Will you deign to await me here, or whither shall I bring my intelligence?

Queen Anne. Here, sir, here. (*Exit Buckingham.*)

Richelieu. Madam, madam, madam! will your imprudence

perpetually give uneasiness to your friends and rejoicing to your enemies? Beware, lady! you are dancing on the brink of a precipice.

Queen A. But are not *you* my friend, dear Cardinal? and is not your exalted virtue a sufficient security for that of your friends?

Riche. Why, it is true, I have always loved your majesty . . . with fatherly tenderness . . . for who can see and not love such beauty, and wit, united with . . . such goodness?

Queen A. "Oh, your eminence shall sit in the conclave when I am to be canonized; but my confessor shall not."

Riche. But, madam, however pure the soul, the conduct should be cautious. Something is due to the public.

Queen A. But, Cardinal, how have I offended the public?

Riche. Besides, you must have observed of late a certain great personage has become uneasy concerning your extreme vivacity of disposition. "You are gradually melting the frost-work of etiquette, which shields the throne from the prying gaze of the vulgar! And yet, shear sovereignty of its glittering ceremony, and what remains but poor humanity?"

Queen A. Cardinal, why do you not accuse me of these crimes to the council? Tell them the Queen of France loves music, sunshine, and happy faces; that she dances in slippers; and, among other treasons, fail not to mention how she loves and venerates the tyrant Cardinal!

Riche. Ah, madam, you know but too well how to enslave! But, *forgive me if I am impertinent*: what do you intend to do with this bold cavalier?

Queen A. I—*forgive you.*

Riche. You know the character of his headstrong, rash, uncalculating nation; let me warn your majesty—

Queen A. Of what, of what, Cardinal?

Riche. Of the quicksands, on which you will run if you row your barque so heedlessly! "It asks a sure eye and a light oar to skim over the smooth shining shallows of a court: for where the waves seem calmest, there lurk the deadliest quicksands."

Queen A. But if innocence, if pure, undeviating honour be my helmsmen?

Riche. Throw them overboard, and take prudence instead! It is your innocence of which I complain: it makes you too bold.

Queen A. I will do my best to leave you no cause of complaint. "I could almost kiss you for your goodness, dear Cardinal; but then you would be vexed, and call me childish."

Riche. Sovereign loveliness! but you have not surely revealed your name and rank to this foreigner?

Queen A. Think you I desire to become the toast of a tavern on the Thames! I but told him I was of the Queen's chamber. Oh! it were passing laughter if I had but thought to tell him that I was the Countess le Dragon—the poor, dear old mummy!

Riche. Prudently done, madam; but he will be back in an instant, and discover you.

Queen A. I intend to vanish in the mean time, and I depute your eminence to inform the court I have retired indisposed. Let the King comprehend I am weary.

Riche. Certainly, madam, and you?—

Queen A. Will hence on the word. Dear Cardinal, good night!

Riche. Good night to your majesty,—my sweet liege! (*Kisses her hand—exit QUEEN.*) She is gone, and surely the light with her!—'Tis a most exquisite and rare perfection!—After all, what is this envied power, these riches, these honours? Dust, dust, dust! The only fruits on the tree of life worth gathering are those of love and beauty! (*Exit RICHE.—enter BUCK.*)

Buck. Madam, the Queen is—ha! the bird is flown! Is this a trick to amuse herself at my expense? She is gone, certainly; and the mysterious old croaker! O, my sweet, sweet rose, would thou wert thy giver!

Enter PRINCE CHARLES.

Prince C. "Ah, this indeed is rapture!—Sir!—"

Buck. "Good even, sir."

Prince C. Buckingham?

Buck. Your grace? (*They unmask.*)

Prince C. How art thou, man?

Buck. Mad—mad.

Prince C. Then let us shake hands: I am mad too. I have fallen in love with a shadow.

Buck. Then the sooner you pick yourself up the better.

Prince C. Yet for all that, I am a lucky, lucky dog!

Buck. Your mother would be proud to hear you say so.

Prince C. Give me not wit, Buckingham, but sympathy. Oh! she is the loveliest of all created things—so good, so modest, so beautiful!—

Buck. What the devil! you have not fallen in love with my mistress, Charles?

Prince C. Thy mistress!—She is too fair, too good, for an angel.

Buck. Then I suppose she is just good enough and fair enough for your highness. But who is this wonderful wonder?

Prince C. “The most lovely, the most bewitching woman that—”

Buck. “O, of course; but I mean is she a phantom, like my sylph, or a rainbow; or hath she a name and a dwelling place?”

Prince C. I know only that she is of the Queen’s retinue; but, dear Buckingham, such angelic beauty and virtue—

Buck. Can’t possibly exist together.

Prince C. I forgive your scepticism—you have not seen her.

Buck. Besides, I am ferociously in love on my own account! I would I had some witch-rod to direct me where. But, my lord, you forget; you must not think any woman fair till you see the Infanta.

Prince C. Confound the Infanta!

Buck. You will have more cause to say so when she is your wife.

Prince C. Which she shall never be!

Buck. Bravo!—and what will become of your father’s ten years’ laborious treaty?

Prince C. Nay, Buckingham, did I not say I was mad? Have patience with me, mine ancient friend, and give me your advice.

Buck. As a counsellor, or as a lover?

Prince C. As both.

Buck. As a counsellor—to horse instantly, and away to Madrid!—As a lover, stay a week or so and see the curiosities of Paris.

Prince C. But what chance of catching our beauties again in so vast a sea?

Buck. Fish with a golden hook; women always bite at that.

Prince C. She!—Surely you noted her not!—’Twas she with the diamonds braided in her beautiful hair!—How lovely women

look in that fashion What head dress like you best on your mistress, Buckingham?

Buck. Her nightcap!—But does your Highness feel sufficiently enamoured to sacrifice the splendid alliance which courts you, to the chance smile of an inconstant Frenchwoman?

Prince C. Chance, Buckingham!—Oh, if there be truth in woman—

Buck. Truth in woman!—ha, ha, ha! truth in woman—stability in water.

Prince C. I tell thee, Buckingham!—but you judge all women—

Buck. By the samples I have seen, as ye judge a bushel of corn by a handful.—“But be not angered. I believe your damsel to be the most virtuous of—of court dames, whose virtues are proverbial.”

Prince C. “George, George, wilt thou ne’er ope mouth but a vper flies out?”

Buck. “Well, faith, I am often witty against the grain; but wit is an unbroken colt, that runs away with his rider, and throws him oft in a ditch or a quickset hedge. I have known the world too well to speak well of it. I have been behind the scenes, and know of what the gilded trumpery is made wherewith they dazzle the gaping multitude in the world’s great theatre.”—But hush, here are steps.

Enter KING LOUIS, RICHELIEU, and MME. LE DRAGON.

King L. A headache?—Methinks ’twas very sudden.

Le D. Her Grace is rather subject to headaches, may it please you, sire.

King L. It does not please me, madam: it grieves me.

Le D. It grieves all France, Sire.

King L. It grieves not a single soul in all France, madam! And she is gone to rest with this headache?

Le D. To attempt to rest, please you, with little success I fear.

King L. Ha! you fear? Will your fear mar your supper?

Le D. If your Majesty is displeas’d with me.

King L. Which I am not.

Le D. I beg your Majesty’s pardon.

King L. I have none to give, madam! I asked you concerning my wife’s health, and you beg my pardon. And she begs not to be disturb’d?

Le D. If such be your pleasure, sire.

King L. My pleasure has nothing to do in the matter. Tell her I wish her a good night; and good night to yourself.

Le D. I humbly thank your Majesty. [*Exit LE DRAGON.*]

Buck. (aside)—Oh! the old interrupter! And in such company. Monseigneur?

Riche. Your pleasure with us, sir?

King L. Richelieu, do we know these gentlemen?

Riche. It is not my good fortune, sire.

Buck. My Lord Cardinal, I believe I am not quite unknown to your eminence.

Riche. True, sir, true: I had the honour of conversing with you and Madame Le Dragon.

Buck. Le Dragon? I thank you.

Riche. You have no cause.

King L. You are of England, cavaliers?

Prince C. Sire, yes.

King L. Umph! we are glad of it. We mean . . . Cardinal, what do we mean?

Riche. Gentlemen, his Majesty wishes you all a good night; he would be alone.

Exeunt PRINCE CHARLES, BUCKINGHAM, and COURTIERS.

King L. It was rather sudden, Cardinal; very sudden. There is more in this than meets the eye. Ever I have found rank mud and slime beneath the bright bubbling waters. Eh! do you think it possible?

Riche. Everything is possible which is not impossible, Sire.

King L. Then it is possible I may be deceived in her, Cardinal?

Riche. In whom, sire?

King L. The Queen!—What dost thou think?

Riche. She is young, beautiful, likes amusements—

King L. But the Queen of France, Richelieu—

Riche. Is a girl of eighteen, sire; and youth is a fault which mends every day. The fairest flowers air themselves in the sunbeams, yet lose neither colour nor fragrance.

King L. Nay, but . . . come nearer, Cardinal . . . I am not naturally jealous—slow, indeed, to suspect: but deem you she loves me?

Riche. Loves you, sire? Ay, so as woman never loved before!

King L. Your words are balm to my hurt soul, Richelieu. Happy the sovereign who has such a counsellor!

Riche. Happy the counsellor who has such a sovereign! But what does your Grace suspect?—A lover?

King L. A lover! Ha! who dares love my wife, the Queen?

Riche. The King.

King L. Ay, too well: but he loves his honour better. I know ye all, too . . . I sail among quicksands; but you are my pilot, and I will not fear. Come with me to my chamber, I would speak more to you. Marked you those strangers?

(*Exeunt.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.

The Queen's antichamber. Enter MADAME LE DRAGON and MIGNON with a basket of flowers.

Mig. Madame! be so good as to stop, madame! the stiff old thing goes on ice.

Le Drag. Well, boy! well, boy! well, boy!

Mig. If madame pleases to refuse the present, I will distribute it among the ladies of my acquaintance.

Le Drag. Why, you little booby, did you not begin with that word? Who was the giver? and what is it?

Mig. Oh, such a handsome young gentleman; but he must be a fool.

Le Drag. Flowers!—does the man take me for a butterfly? Let me see, when did I last receive a nosegay? Ay, Rambouillac's was the last—a man of infinite taste!—Pity he died before I relaxed in the least from my severity.

Mig. He was lucky, *I* think!

Le Drag. The Queen jeered me yesterday on what she calls the prudence of my admirers. She would scarcely believe this.

Mig. Nor any one else that knows madame.

Le Drag. Boy, do you wish to do me a service?

Mig. O yes, amazingly—(*aside*) if a rope were of any.

Le Drag. Then bring these flowers after me into the presence, pretending that I have not seen them, and mind to let the Queen hear the donor described; and I'll reward thee, child.

Mig. Will you give me the falcon you have promised me these six months?

Le Drag. I may or—I may not. (*Exit.*)

Mig. I know which; but I will do her bidding if but to see how the sweet Queen will extract merriment from the old woman's folly. Some one means to make a fool of her, and it were a sin not to help him. (*Exit.*)

SCENE II.

The Queen's apartment. PRINCESS HENRIETTE alone.

Princess H. Would we had never met! Yet wherefore not? For love to blossom so lowly down that the light cannot reach to ripen it to fruit, is surely not waste; but a generous profusion in nature, which will oft scatter violets in unknown clefts of rocks. I am too high for happiness—would I had been too low for misery! Were I now some rustic vassal's daughter, this hand and this heart might go, as nature meant them, together. Loving and loved, life were but a merry dance in vintage time, and death but a sunset rest under the green vine-light. Nay, but did not Charlemagne's daughter prefer love to empire? Why are the days of romance gone?

Enter QUEEN ANNE.

Queen A. Musing, sweet sister? Wilt take a gold crown for thy thoughts?

Princess H. Nay, you shall have them at their worth—nothing. I was thinking of the ball last night.

Queen A. And moralizing on it like a Huguenot preacher? Ah! and what hopes of turning to the true faith the young English heretic who tripped it so lightly with you?

Princess H. Hopes—none.

Queen A. Why that blush?—sighing? Do folks feel sad and willowy in love, sister?

Princess H. Sad? I am as gay as a bird.

Queen A. Ay, if the bird be a love-lorn nightingale. Tell me, dost feel as if a cottage and honeysuckles were preferable to a palace? In short, is every rational idea turned upside down in thy head?

Princess H. What then?

Queen A. Why then you are in love.

Princess H. How know you the symptoms so well? But, in my turn, where did *you* vanish to so suddenly last night?

Queen A. I thought—I—the truth is, Henriette—

Princess H. Mind,—the truth!

Queen A. Wherever, the Cardinal Richelieu was with me, malicious!

Princess H. The Cardinal hath of late devoted himself as your shadow. Have you marked that?

Queen A. I were no woman if I did not. He really burned my hand kissing it, last levee. But when we are alone, I never let him talk of anything but steeples, and synods, “and the blessed candles of Loretto.” I would, though, I could extract some explicit meaning from him—something to seize him by,—not those slippery nothings of his by which you shall as securely tell his drift as children the time o’day by blowing a field-clock to shreds and downs.

Princess H. “Well, well, sweet sister, I need not warn you be virtuous, for the Cardinal is—”

Queen A. “Old?”

Princess H. Hush! I hear the cat-like step of the King’s spy, Madame Le Dragon, whose presence is a frost on all mirth.

Queen A. “Would she were—I care not, though it were in heaven.” (*Enter LE DRAGON.*) Good morrow to you, madame. You look gay this morning. I congratulate you on the unknown cause.

Le Drag. Your Majesty is too good, I have no particular cause. That is, hi, hi, hi! I have no reason on earth.

Queen A. Own you that? Nay, there is joy shining through all your attempts to be dull—usually so successful. Let us share your mirth. Is your husband dead? “Ay, ay, we all know a young wife is a dangerous companion for a gouty sexagenarian. But no, you are not in weeds; and I am persuaded the moment you are fairly at sea again, you will hoist the black flag. The death’s head you have on your shoulders.”

Le Drag. "Your Majesty is too partial to me. You are pleased always to sharpen your wit on me."

Queen A. "And a very good grinding-stone you are, though a little roughened by long use. Believe me, I would rather lose my handkerchief than your invaluable services: your place in my court could scarcely be supplied. I know not any lady of honourable extract who would undertake the duties, though his Majesty should double the emoluments—they are so peculiar, and in spite of all my efforts, I fear, so harassing."

Le Drag. "Hi, hi, hi! your Majesty's vein of humour is particularly rich."

Queen A. "My curiosity is excited to the highest degree to learn what can have induced Madame Le Dragon to express herself agreeably? Could we be assured of so brilliant a compliment every time we saw you, we were going to say, we should be glad to see you again."

Princess H. My sister! Ah, madame, were you amused with yesterday's masque?

Le Drag. O extravagantly.

Queen A. Ay, 'tis the wildfire of the blood at sixty! The senses are ripe then. The sour greenness of youth mellowed yellow. Only the fruit should not linger on the tree, wrinkled and musty, to the shame of the lean hobbling gardener, Death.

Princess H. "Madame Le Dragon, where have you gathered so much of that bitter herb, called patience?"

Le Drag. "I have spent my life at court amassing it."

Queen A. "Then, be generous, and distribute it among your acquaintance. I am sure they need it."

Le Drag. "I am a lady of the bedchamber to your Grace, and cannot spare any." What have you there, boy?

Enter MIGNON.

Mig. You know, madame,—it is what—

Le Drag. Now, simpleton!

Mig. Oh, no, I forgot;—you know nothing about it, nothing at all.

Le Drag. Well, what is it?

Mig. A present of flowers.

Queen A. (*aside.*) I am lost! The madcap has discovered me. The hag will have me at her mercy in a moment.

Mig. To whom, madame, you will hardly believe; "but 'tis as true as that a face is spoilt with wrinkles."

Queen A. I suppose some foolish hair brain has been presumptuous or silly enough—

Mig. The latter, please you.

Le Drag. Why so, pertness? Cannot a handsome young man who sees one at a ball. . . .

Queen A. Madame, excuse me; but if you mean this for satire, I take it for impertinence. The folly of the youth—

Le Drag. Folly! how folly? I beg your royal pardon if I interrupted, but what is there unusual in the thing? A commonplace civility. What deems your Highness?

Princess H. I, madame;—if they are sent to me,—

Le Drag. Oh, they are not sent to your Highness, I believe.

Princess H. But if they were, I should be exceedingly—

Queen A. Pleased. And so would any woman with any token of admiration, “were it but a cinder from a dustman, But methinks this is the first present of the kind which, since you have been about our person, has been suffered to reach us.”

Le Drag. “Why, your Majesty will observe I generally throw them away, as simple trifles one has no time to despise.”

Queen A. Why, Mignon, who has sent these sweet flowers?

Mig. A handsome young Englishman with a rose in his breast.

Queen A. A rose!

Princess H. An Englishman! } together.

Le Drag. And what did he say?

Mig. Oh, he said, “Little devil, if thou wilt deliver this bunch of blossoms to Madame Le Dragon, my lovely lady, I will give thee a gold plaything.”

Le Drag. Well, child, and what didst thou answer?

Mig. I laughed. Oh, I said, if he was fond of jesting, I was not of a box of the ear, for that you were not lovely at all, but terribly ugly. I said all I could to make him see how wicked he was!—And then he winked and looked so knowing.

Queen A. Ay?

Mig. And asked me if your husband were not very jealous. And I said, “Like enough, for folks were mostly so where they had least cause.”

Le Drag. Very well. Throw them all into the river.

Queen A. Nay, if you despise them so much, perchance you will confer them on us.

Le Drag. My life, my property, my very soul, are at your Grace's service.

Queen A. I only want the flowers. (*The PAGE kneels and presents them. The QUEEN shakes them, and a letter drops out.*) As I thought! 'Tis a forward gentleman, in sooth, whose buds of liking need but little sun to burst into scarlet-blossom.

Le Drag. What, a love letter! What, does the fellow think already to—I shall take this instantly, sealed as it is, to Monsieur Le Dragon: “so convincing a proof of my virtue—”

Queen A. “Will not render it a wink less doubtful.” Would you add the horrors of jealousy to the pangs of the gout? You know we are confidantes. (*Opens letter.*)

Princess H. What does he say?

Queen A. What an age we live in! First of all, a flourish about darts,—fire,—purity,—passion,—death,—constancy,—and all that nonsense; then a little sober pressing. O, Countess, Countess, the world is nigh its end—an assignation!

Le Drag. Impudent rascal! Does he name the place?

Queen A. The gardens of the palace, at the Dolphin Fountain. Good troth, this is fast travelling. Do you go, madame?

Le Drag. I go! I have a grain of wisdom left.

Queen A. Oh, you are the goddess herself. But then you have her shield, the face of Medusa. Go, go, Le Dragon!

Le Drag. Would I could be revenged on the wretch!

Queen A. Comply with his request then.

Le Drag. I!

Queen A. 'Twere the bitterest revenge. But, soberly, this companion's impudence craves chastisement. It sets my cheek on fire, but to think what he must think of—*you*, Le Dragon! And but perchance for a few moments of indiscreet gaiety—

Le Drag. Gaiety! I never was duller in my life than last night.

Queen A. Indeed! Come, come, we will be properly revenged. Write a Will o' th' Wisp consent, and we'll lure him into spending the night, listening to the bubble of a fountain, alone as death.

Princess H. What, accept the appointment?

Queen A. Ay! but never keep it. Nay, you shall say 'yes,' or I shall think you mean it.

Le Drag. Well, if it amuses your Majesty—

Queen A. Into my cabinet, and write a reply then—Henriette and I will abet. (*Exit LE DRAGON.*) Henriette, was there ever any impudence like this Englishman's?

Princess H. Not recorded, I think.

Queen A. From a few fast words, prompted by his own rattling vivacity, to form such auguries!

Princess H. I trust your Grace does not impute any lightness to—

Queen A. Oh, you deem this epistle from your cavalier? It is but signed, "Love's Prisoner."

Princess H. I know not what to think. He seemed so respectful, so—

Queen A. So everything that he ought to have been? But be it as it may, one of us will be properly revenged. Le Dragon will keep the appointment.

Princess H. Impossible.

Queen A. As flies in summer.

Princess H. A woman of her stern propriety—

Queen A. Tut, virtue is never so loud that it is not hollow. What would you give to detect this false woman, and so be rid of her tyranny?

Princess H. But how? but how?

Queen A. There is an arbour of matted vine and honeysuckle close on the fountain; we will hide in it and watch. Our sport shall be either to detect Le Dragon and witness the discomfiture of the meeting, or to watch this forward gallant stalking with his shadow in the moonlight for company, until he weary, or we.

Princess H. But have you the courage?

Queen A. To hide myself? Oh, nothing frightens me—but a grasshopper, or a sudden mouse! Tut, I'll prove as brave as the fiercest mustachios among them—so that I see nothing to frighten me. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III*.

Chamber in the Louvre. RICHELIEU and FRIAR JOSEPH.

Joseph. The anti-chamber is thronged, my Lord.

Riche. They will keep each other warm.

Joseph. By'r Lady, some of them looked chafed enough.

Riche. "They are courtiers; let them eat air."

Joseph. "But, your eminence, some of our greatest nobles—"

* In the adaptation to the stage the two subsequent scenes remain unchanged.

Riche. Tell them, the King is late to-day, or they too early. (*Exit* JOSEPH.) O man, man! why was reason given to such a fool? A lamp to guide the blind!—Am I the sun? Can they not live and breathe without my smile? These nobles of France whom I have crushed beneath my sandals, methinks, like bruised lavender, they offer sweeter incense the more they are trampled upon!

Enter KING LOUIS.

King L. Cardinal, you muse; let me not interrupt.

Riche. Your Grace may share my meditations with profit. I was reflecting on the Emperor's protocol—

King L. Reflect then in silence. I am not well to-day, Richelieu. My mind is disquiet;—I cannot think.

Riche. Remember, sire, on that mind depends the welfare of twenty millions of men.

King L. No, Cardinal, no! Future ages will be more just to you—and to me, too!

Riche. Your grace has not slept well, doubtless;—have you consulted your physician?

King L. His drugs cannot relieve the soul, unless by freeing it from the carcass. O, Richelieu, my friend!—may I call thee?

Riche. Sire!

King L. "Would I were a woman, that I might weep like one!" O, Cardinal!—but you have never loved. There is but one heart which I prize under the heavens, and that—is not mine.

Riche. The Queen, sire, is too young, too innocent, to return your passion as it deserves; but she "dearly esteems you, and these buds of liking will expand into the full, rich bloom of womanly love anon."

King L. Le Dragon tells me, 'twas she who danced so constantly last night with that stranger you saw.

Riche. Your Grace mistakes the vivacity of youth for levity. She needs some sober counsellor perchance to warn her of a few light indiscretions which only innocence would dare commit. My great office gives me some influence over her;—if it please you, I will myself undertake the task.

King L. When will you see her then?—this evening?

Riche. "When her Grace will grant me the honour;" but her evenings are usually spent listening to the lutes and love-warblings of her youthful court.

King L. She shall see you. I will send word that I am coming, and would find her alone;—you shall go in my stead.

Riche. I obey your will in all things, sire. “Will it please you now to give audience?”

King L. And yet, Richelieu, be not harsh. Perchance it is but gaiety of temper, as thou sayest. She is too fragile to bear a rough wind:—temper it;—thou knowest. *(Exit.)*

Riche. Fear not, my Liege. *(Pauses, rings a bell. Enter Friar Joseph.)* Joseph! prepare my violet robes for the evening, my diamond cross and chain presented by the Holy Father. Select my sweetest essences;—look that my toilet be prepared with more than usual care.—Tell me, do I look pale?

Joseph. A touch of rouge would improve your eminence’s complexion, and if it please you, we can have a little very natural!—he, he, he!

Riche. What makes thee merry, Joseph?

Joseph. The Huguenot rebels, who were seized yesterday,—will your eminence sign the warrant for their execution?

Riche. Truly, I had forgotten. Give me the paper. *(Signs.)* And, Joseph! let me have my skirt of gold lace which the Queen wrought for me.—There!—And, Joseph, let me have their heads on the city gates at sunset.

SCENE IV.

Queen’s apartment. QUEEN and a GENTLEMAN-IN-WAITING.

Queen A. The King will sup with me to-night—alone?—’Tis well;—tell his Majesty, I wait his pleasure. *(Exit GENTLEMAN.)* To-night, and why?—because it is necessary to frustrate my designs. Alas! do I need to learn that a royal mouth can swallow meats, fruits, wines? But ’tis ever thus with Fortune: lending soft gales to waft men almost into port, and then with a rude and boisterous breath driving them farther off than ever!—And ’tis certain Le Dragon goes!—O, the merriment I miss! And am I a woman, and foiled by such a counterblast! Alack, alack! please destiny or not—

Enter MADAME LE DRAGON.

Le D. May it please your Majesty, the Cardinal Richelieu.

Queen A. Would he were—where his virtues entitle him to be.

Le D. Do you deign to receive him?

Queen A. Yes, as we receive others—at *their* pleasure, and our despite. But you are surprisingly gay to-night, Countess! Changed all at once to a butterfly!—Is the moon full?

Le D. I was not aware of any transformation.—I am plain myself, I hope.

Queen A. Plain enough; but go and admit the Cardinal. (*Exit LE DRAGON.*) They paint Sin after her portrait surely!—the old hypocrite . . . Good even to your eminence.

Enter RICHELIEU.

Riche. At your royal commands.

Queen A. You are thoughtful, Cardinal?

Riche. The weight of a kingdom, madame, does not allow much dancing in the bearer.

Queen A. This is one of your answers in which you contrive to speak without saying anything.

Riche. The eyes, sweet Queen, can talk eloquent language, and without fear of being noted in a lawyer's brief.

Queen A. I thought that speech was given us to express our thoughts.

Riche. You are young and may think so.

Queen A. And you, dear Cardinal, would you insinuate you are old? Certes, those locks of yours are gray with care, not years.

Riche. To a lady's eye it matters little which, I fear.

Queen A. Count that among your few mistakes.

Riche. Ah, would it were possible to think—

Queen A. Faint heart; you know the adage.

Riche. Nay, nay, I will cry "sour grapes;" the fruit hangs too high.

Queen A. Tush!—I have heard of a schoolboy who stole a bunch while the gardener went for his ladder.

Riche. And I have heard of another, who fell and cracked his skull.

Queen A. But was it so solid as yours?

Riche. I know not; your Grace is very earnest, but I seldom tread on grass till I am sure it is not growing on water.

Queen A. Well but, dear Cardinal, the pleasure of your company makes me forget to ask to what cause I owe it?

Riche. And in truth, I forgot my errand, contemplating the loveliness to which it is addressed!

Queen A. I comprehend—you are the first bright rush of light announcing the coming of the sun!

Riche. Madam, the King will not be here to night; it grieves me to say, he is displeased with you.

Queen A. What! he will not come? Are you sure, Cardinal?

Riche. Your Majesty seems pleased. I fear you have misunderstood me?

Queen A. Oh, no; not with the message, but with the messenger. Ah, you smile? Dear Cardinal, you cannot tell how I love you.

Riche. Love me!

Queen A. Yes, with a daughter's love (I had almost said with a grand-daughter's). You say the King is displeased with me. What is the matter?

Riche. His majesty is displeased with those very qualities which intoxicate all other men with love and admiration—your wit and gaiety.

Queen A. Very likely: husbands take these whimsies, you know. But I was born under a merry star, and am neither an heir nor a minister of state, to smile when I am sad, or weep when I am glad.

Riche. The King suspects your conduct of some lightness, lady—being therein most unjust.

Queen A. Let us talk of something pleasanter even than a husband's faults.—You spoke of a matter in which I might pleasure you: what is it?

Riche. But how if my wish accomplished were harmful to yourself?

Queen A. Why then; but it cannot be!—Are you not my friend, and I yours? Give me your hand. And now tell me, do you not love me too well to harm me;

Riche. "I dare not answer, while this touch melts my soul!" I fear,—madam, I hope . . . harm you? Oh, I would die to win one poor unregarded smile from you!

Queen A. How!

Riche. Yes, beautiful Queen!—my o'erfraught soul can no longer contain itself! I love you, adore you! Oh, do not, do

not condemn me to despair! I have long worshipped you in my secret heart, and the impulse which now throws me at your feet, would else drive me to madness!

Queen A. Is it possible!—I thought you could only hate thus? Rise, Cardinal. Trust me, you are already mad.

Riche. "I will never rise, till you have bade me not despair!"

Queen A. "Then you will be found here at the day of judgment: a somewhat unseemly posture for a Prince of the Church." Arise, I tell you,—you are mad.

Riche. But, sovereign lady, you forgive me—you bid me hope for mercy. Oh, by this celestial loveliness—

Queen A. Traitor! Insolent vassal—avaunt; I hate, despise, spurn thee!—Away! and hope for nothing but that my foolish mercy may so far forgive thy treason and monstrous ingratitude as to keep them concealed from him who should punish them with the block!—Begone!—but remember, you are henceforth in my power.

Riche. But, madam, my Queen!

Queen A. Begone, wretch!—I will not hear a word. So good a master—O, heartless hypocrite! What, woo the wife of a King, of a friend, to dishonour!—Cardinal, I detest thy passion, and despise thy hypocrisy;—Who waits there? (*Enter MIGNON.*) Le Dragon!

Mign. Madam, please you, has retired indisposed.

Queen A. So much the better. Light out his eminence, youth.—Good night, Lord Cardinal.

Riche. I kiss your gracious hands: (*Aside.*) This mockery is too bitter. (*Exeunt RICHELIEU and MIGNON.*)

Queen A. Ah, methinks I have changed the love-sparkle in his eyes to the more priestly glow of hatred. Now to my trick on this Englishman. "Oh, I will be properly revenged for his impudence; albeit, not knowing me to be who I am, his offence is by no means on a par with the Cardinal's." Mignon!

(*Re-enters.*)

Queen A. Is all prepared? The Princess warned?

Mign. Yes, madam,

Queen A. Let us instantly then to join her, at the Dolphins' Fountain. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE V.

*The gardens of the Louvre. A bower and fountain of Dolphins.
Moonlight. Enter QUEEN ANNE, HENRIETTE, and MIGNON.*

Queen A. Courage, sister! nay, we are here betimes, I heard the chimes give an half-hour's grace. Courage, what are you afraid of? Ah! what is that?

Princess H. Nay, what are you *not* afraid of? A withered leaf coming full gallop on the wind!

Queen A. Well, I can be brave enough, too, when I see there is no occasion! I believe I am as valiant as any of the party—meaning thee no offence, Mignon, but the truth will out at times, like pent fire, do what we will.

Mign. But your valour has no weapon, Madam,—mine has!
(*Shows a Sword.*)

Queen A. Thou!—and canst scarce carry it! I marvel men fight with such heavy irons . . . but their heads are so hard they could not knock each others' brains out else . . . if any that do go to wars garnish their helmets with such superfluities! Take it, boy; thy type of courage—It is like to be all of the quality we shall have among us.

Mign. I trust not, Madam, or men will hold me for an usurper of my father's name.

Queen A. Well, I doubt not, in time, thou wilt do homicide on as little provocation as another. But now let us into our covert, and lie there as still as hunters that expect the stealthy deer, in some shadowy glade.

Princess H. After your greatness.

Queen A. My greatness waives precedence into danger—'Tis a dark reception-room. The page may have it for me.

Princess H. Hark, there are voices coming this way—We must in, or our whole plot fails.

Queen A. It shall not.—Mignon, away among the trees, and peep hovering about far and near to give us warning if any profane steps stray hitherward.

Mign. I will be like jack-o'-lantern—here, there, and everywhere!
(*Exeunt QUEEN ANNE and HENRIETTE into the bower.*)

Enter BUCKINGHAM and PRINCE CHARLES.

Buck. Here we are at last; this is the pleached arbour, all glistening over with honey dew. But where is my nightingale of love?

Prince C. Happy Buckingham!

Buck. Never talk of a man's happiness till you see it in his grasp, nor then perchance; many a rosy apple breaks, eaten, into bitter dust.

Prince C. Well, methought there was a dash of severity in the reply.

Buck. But the tenderness breathing through it, like mignonette through a briar hedge!

Prince C. Thou art the favourite of some lucky star!

Buck. 'Tis the very trick of envy to impute great men's fortunes to the planets—Whereas, if I had not bestirred me pretty impudently this morning, I were now like any other idle lover, sighing with crossed arms, and marvelling what's o'clock!

Prince C. She was ripe, too, to yield at the first pluck.

Buck. Oh, they are all alike!—Besides, I flatter myself, there are few who can resist me. Ahem!

Prince C. Thou wrongest one at least—the enchantress of my last night's dream!—What a night is this for love!—I must be happy but in thinking of mine—but you will see her whom you adore, press her beloved hand, hear her sweet voice!—

Buck. For Heaven's sake, stop, Prince, or you will make me blush! “O tortoise Time, that yet winnest the race from the swift! would I were on thy back, and thou shouldst out-gallop the horses of Phæton down the skyey precipice!—But as I am not, let us charm him on with a chanson. (*Sings.*)

“Would you chain Love's flighty wing,

Leave him free—free as air!

'Tis but when he feels the string,

He would fly—fly the snare!—

Leave him free—free as air.

But would you, vexed with rosy lies,

Strive from his arms to sever,

Yield but a moment to his sighs,

He'll fly the next for ever!—

Fly the next for ever!”

Prince C. "The song were a good song but for the singer."—
I'll wager thee, Villiers, my lady is infinitely lovelier than thine!

Buck. Venus, I tell thee, is a kitchen wench compared with mine!

Prince C. She is worthy then to be tirewoman to mine!—Is your lady fair?

Buck. As daybreak!

Prince C. A squeamish comparison!—Mine is of the rosy brown of a summer noonday!—Is she young?

Buck. As the simplest of Venus's doves.

Prince C. Virtuous?

Buck. Or what should bring her here?

Prince C. Hast thou not said she is simple?

Buck. Why she is more witty than wise, as mostly happens to women when they are not fools.

Queen A. (Aside.) One may learn matters out of Salamanca!

Prince C. In brief, thy lady is—

Buck. A daughter of Eve—an incarnation of moonshine, since she comes not! 'Tis a false trick women have, since they would in truth, if they followed their inclinations, be ever the first at a rendezvous, to be ever the last! If she comes not suddenly, my love will all be spent, for 'tis like to exhale, like the must from my handkerchief! My heart, like a mirror, reflects only present objects. But, prythee, retire—perchance my bird is scared from the nest by your presence. Hist, here comes my sweet simpleton!

Prince C. Peeping cautiously as the moonlight among the trees!—Happy rogue!—I take honesty's fee, and leave you. (*Exit.*)

Buck. "Happy be he ever that deserves to be!—That were a motto, in faith, for a new order of knighthood!" Yes, there she comes!—How my heart beats like my lady's lubbard son's caught kissing her waiting wench!—She comes!—This sweet smell is not of honeysuckles; it is her breath!—Her very step!—How fine is love's sense!—Amidst a million I should know that musical footfall!—soft as dew on the flowers!—Pit-a-pat!—Butterflies alight with more noise on the roses!—Oh, joy, she is here!

Enter LE DRAGON.

Oh my loveliest, loveliest—

Le Drag. Oh, my dear, dear, sir!—for I suppose you are the gentleman?

Buck. Oh! I suppose I am Madame, who are you?

Le Drag. The lady you danced with last night! Are you not Milor Herbert?

Buck. I!

Le Drag. Hush!—speak low!—The incredible danger I run for your sake ought to excite your eternal gratitude!

Buck. Madame . . . I confess . . . there is some mistake.

Le Drag. There is no mistake, sir! You may believe in the excess of your happiness.

Buck. But I am not Milor Herbert!

Le Drag. But you are yourself! I am the Countess Le Dragon—I received your delicious letter!

Buck. Good Heavens! then there is a dowager!—I did certainly, Madame, expect a lady beautiful . . . and indulgent, as yourself . . .

Le Drag. Well then?—

Buck. But . . . (*QUEEN and HENRIETTE laugh in the bower.*) I think . . . I am sure . . . I heard some one laugh!—And, Madam, however my heart clamours, I would not for the world purchase my happiness at any hazard to your reputation. This exposed place—

Le Drag. Is perfectly secluded! Explain yourself—I confide absolutely in your honour—

Queen A. (*Entering with HENRIETTE*) And in my discretion!

Le Drag. Lost—ruined—betrayed!

Queen A. Lost, indeed, thou grandmother Vice!—Where are now your moral saws, your upturned eyes, your rebukes to the most harmless merriment?—Hypocrite! do you know me?

Le Drag. For all the saints' sakes, mercy, mercy, my —

Queen A. Hush! if you would not I should proclaim you!—So, sir, you consoled yourself thus for my disdain?

Buck. Disdain!—have I not the supreme happiness to behold Madame Le Dragon?

Queen A. He is enamoured to madness of you, Countess, indeed!

Buck. And thus at your divine feet—

Le Drag. Yes, let us kneel together—together let us implore the mercy we need so much! (*Kneels beside BUCKINGHAM.*)

Buck. Unhand me!—sorceress, that brought me hither by spells of resistless beauty—

Queen A. What, cavalier! dare you pretend that I am the dame, whom by your own allowance you have so 'impudently

wooded and won'—like 'all the rest of those who find it impossible to resist you'—an 'incarnation of moonshine!'—'a daughter of Eve!'—'a lady fair, young, and virtuous,' or—'what should put her here?'—'more witty than wise!'—'a reflection in that mirroring heart of yours!'—'object of a passion which lasts like a diffusing essence'—and to conclude and crown all, a 'sweet simpleton!'—as methinks, by your present looks, your mate should be!

Buck. Mock me to death, lady!—It were not ill to die, smothered in roses!—But by the moon! and the waters! and the firm resolves of woman!—I know not what I rave, but are you not Madame Le Dragon?

Le Drag. I am! I am!

Buck. Not you! Not you!—

Queen A. Dream not to deceive me thus! 'Amidst a million,' you would 'know that musical footfall, soft as dew on the flowers!' Did that argue an acquaintance?—'Pit-a-pat!—butterflies alight with more noise on the roses!'—'Oh, joy, she is there!'—and I leave you to it!

Buck. Lady!—

Queen A. Great men may at times be glad to lady their miscarriages on the stars, you see!—Your friend was not so confident in his, but he had better cause!—What is his name?

Buck. His name is—Stuart!—

Queen A. Monsieur Stuart!—

Enter PRINCE CHARLES.

Prince C. Who calls my namesake?

Queen A. I . . . to bid you take an eternal farewell of your last night's partner!—I have taken mine of mine.

Prince C. Softly . . . softly!—Do I dream or is it . . . yes, 'tis she!—Sweet lady, am I already forgotten?

Princess H. No, nor can be, but—I would tell you, cavalier, wherefore to encourage hope would in me be cruelty—in you, madness! After which we must part for ever. Would we had never met!

Prince C. So say not I, though death conclude the tale! Wherefore should I, lady? Did you not assure me your heart never yet owned a lord?

Princess H. I could oath it, gentleman, without dread of perjury! But heart and hand of mine may never go together . . . apart, they shall not.

Prince C. Nor mine, I swear it! But wherefore may they not link indissolubly with mine?

Princess H. You know not then . . . you have not guessed . . .

Enter MIGNON.

Mig. Hide yourselves, mesdames! The Cardinal, with all his train, is coming this way.

Le Drag. One stroke for redemption! Ho! help! treason!
(*Exit.*)

Princess H. We are lost!

Prince C. Lady, I will defend you to my heart's last drainings! (*draws.*)

Buck. And though scorned so utterly, mine, Lady, shall beat its last in your defence!

Queen A. Do not die for me! It will not oblige me at all! I want no man's ghost after me, and, least of all, yours! Let us escape.

Prince C. It is impossible—we are surrounded.

Queen A. One chance remains! Henriette and I will conceal ourselves! Fly, Mignon, if you love me!

[*Enters bower with HENRIETTE. Exit MIGNON.*]

Buck. Let us set our swords quarrelling.

Prince C. And blind suspicion at all hazards!

[*They feign to fight. Enter GUARDS, headed by JOSEPH.*]

Joseph. Here are the rioters! Down upon them! Seize all found! 'Tis the Cardinal's order.

Buck. Give way! I will have the slanderer's life! England against any odds!

Enter RICHELIEU and LE DRAGON.

Riche. What means this broil? (*aside to LE DRAGON*) Madame, you are out of your senses—I left her but an hour ago in a paroxysm of virtue.

Le Drag. She is well recovered then! If this earth be earth, 'twas she!

Riche. Not a word on your life! Sirs, yield your swords. Where are the other rioters fled?

GUARDS enter with MIGNON.

Le Drag. No doubt, she has taken refuge in the harbour.

Mig. Oh, that horrid sword! to trip up his owner!

Riche. Bring the personages hither! Your names and business in the royal purlieu? (*aside*) 'Tis her gibing page.

Mig. I . . . don't know.

Riche. The Queen's favourite page may have lawful business here. But you, sirs?

Buck. The prattle of our swords that guided your interference, may answer.

Riche. You met—to fight a duel?

Buck. Or a quartett, on provocation, my lord!

Riche. A choleric butterfly!—Know you not I have prohibited duels on penalty of death to the survivor?

Buck. Oh, but we did not mean to kill one another!

Riche. Joseph, guide these English friends of ours to the Bastille.

Buck. My lord! for whom do you take us?

Riche. For . . . your *mothers'* sons . . . that side of the house is generally sure! Let no one, under pain of sharing their fate, speak with them.

Prince C. Submit in silence, Villiers, happy that the punishment falls only on us.

[*Exeunt* BUCKINGHAM, PRINCE CHARLES, and GUARDS.]

Riche. Boy, I pardon thee for thy mistress' sake! (*Exit* MIGNON.) Begone!—Ere I credit your accusation, countess, I must behold the delinquents palpably. But it needs not your presence. Retire to my palace, and await me there. (*Exit* LE DRAGON.) Come forth, whoever is within, if you would not have me use more potent evocation!

Queen A. (*entering with* HENRIETTE) Yes, Cardinal, it is I—we—who have detected this false espial in an intrigue, and banished her for ever from our presence.

Riche. If so, she is guilty of a crime that craves heavier chastisement—of calumny! She accuses your grace reversely!

Queen A. Hear me but a single instant, and I will convince you—

Riche. That my eyesight deceives me? That I neither see, hear, nor understand aright? That I am as mad as a brief while past you graciously assured me I was?

Queen A. Cardinal, remember!—You are in my power!

Riche. And no wise man would continue longer than he can in any woman's!

Princess H. But I too am witness!

Riche. Alas, madam, wild geese fly in flocks!—Your last night's partner has gone with his friend to the Bastille!—But it is not too late to save the honor of France.

Queen A. The honor of France . . . or . . . its semblance, Cardinal?

Riche. Le Dragon and her legend are in my custody!

Queen A. Promise to keep them so . . . until . . . we meet again!

Riche. I do!

Queen A. (aside) Give me but time to utter it, and the truth shall prove a match—even for Richelieu! *(Exit.)*

Riche. (observing the Queen) What muses she?—Pity 'tis, we cannot set espial on men's thoughts as we can upon their deeds!—We can choke utterance, 'tis true . . . but, like rivers dammed, perchance only to form overrolling cataracts!—Could we but MASTER MIND!—But the dungeon, the scaffold, the rack, the sword—in that strange realm, are powerless!—*Mind only can RULE MIND!*—Sceptre and crozier are but its insignia—or else but fools, baubles, children's playthings!—And shall a woman prove them such in thy hands, Richelieu? *(Exit.)*

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.

An oratory in the Louvre. The KING seated at a table.

A GENTLEMAN.

King L. “Villeroi, bring me my breviary. Open at the *de profundis*, and go.” Let it be understood I would be alone.

Gentleman. Your majesty is obeyed. *(Exit.)*

King L. (reading) Ay, in sooth, 'tis very true; no hour of life but confirms it. *Of few years and many sorrows!*—I care not if mine were fewer still, and yet I am a King! Who is there?

Enter QUEEN ANNE.

Queen A. One who would oftener come were she oftener summoned, or, did she not fear to break in on too mighty reveries, would break formalities to come unsummoned. *(Aside)* 'Tis plain, I have the start of the enemy.

King L. The Queen!

Queen A. Your wife, my Louis!—Call me by no colder name. Why do you gaze so strangely at me?

King L. What do you here, at this hour? When I seek your company, I find you, for the most part, engaged so much more to your liking, that I may well be amazed to see you wilfully confer it.

Queen A. They put these thoughts in you that love neither of us, Louis! But of one of these ill counsellors—the worst—I think now to rid me.

King L. Will not your actions bear espial, then?

Queen A. Not through a glass that distorts them!—Dear Louis, do but hear me. Oh, I have played in so merry an interlude, would make spleen hold her lean sides lest they cracked!

King L. Explain yourself, madam.

Queen A. Nay, but look not angered—I shall weep if you do—I whose eyes still glitter with tears of mirth!

King L. Well, well,—your explanation.

Queen A. Oh, it tickles me like a straw to think on't!—Louis, I have put one of your pieces of purity in the scale, and found it wanting!—Le Dragon—she in whom you trust so much—

King L. Your pardon, madam, I trust in no one—What of Le Dragon?

Queen A. You know at yesternight's ball were two strangers (from England, I think)—One of them danced with a lady of my court, and, (I conjecture) to rid herself of him, she told him her name was Le Dragon. A fiery love letter comes this morning, proposing a meeting in the gardens of the palace. In her vanity she showed it to Henriette and me, affecting to treat the whole affair with contempt—but we observed such signs in her, that—now do not frown, love!

King L. On, on!—

Queen A. We felt certain she would go, and determined to detect her hypocrisy, for I know she doth me ill offices with you, Louis!—and we hid ourselves in the bower with Mignon ready to give the alarm—And she came, and the cavaliers too,—and, oh, such a scene of mutual discomfiture!

King L. She came?—

Queen A. But the gem of the story is to come yet. The Cardinal happening to pass near, heard the altercation, and burst

in upon them—I and Henriette retired into the bower, but—ha, ha, the lovers were seized and sent to the Bastille.

King L. Oh, woman!—Le Dragon—the deceiver!—I must needs laugh.

Queen A. But you forgive my merry folly, dear Louis?

King L. I can refuse thee nothing, child, but—

Queen A. (rising) Oh, time,—time that eats the rosebuds,—will teach me to be sober and sad.

King L. But he is a stern teacher, and leaves the marks of his rod in men's souls!

Riche. (without.) Not speak with the King? My name is Richelieu!

Enter VILLEROI, slightly resisting RICHELIEU's entrance.

Queen A. Let the Cardinal enter! (*Enter Richelieu.*) I sent for his eminence to consult on a fitting punishment for Le Dragon and her lovers, but I beseech you, sire, let it not pass banishment from your court.

King L. We understand your purpose, Cardinal! You come to speak to us of Le Dragon's intrigues, and of its ludicrous catastrophe.

Riche. Le Dragon!—(*aside.*) A woman of genius, worthy to cope with mine! A more importunate affair brings me, sire!—an affair involving the safety of the monarchy!—But we must be alone.

Queen A. Decide on this trifle then at more leisure—I care not to meddle in state policies. (*aside*) I dare not seem afraid!—My Louis, adieu, to a happier hour!—*Your eminence's true daughter!* (*Exit.*)

Riche. Said she Le Dragon? (*sighs*)

King L. Ay, Le Dragon! Speak, what means that sigh? Your eye is full of some dreadful meaning!—speak, speak!

Riche. Le Dragon's version of the tale rings otherwise, my liege; but there are so many counterfeits of truth abroad that the real coin—

King L. She does not,—she dares not—say aught against my wife—against the Queen of France!

Riche. Speak low, sire.—This way;—the walls of palaces at times have played the spy.—Here, sire. (*Whispers earnestly*)

King L. 'Tis false—tis false; as the father of lies who coined it!

Riche. Nay, 'tis but Le Dragon's story—merely reversing the accusation—that is all!

King L. If I but dreamed it true—Richelieu! the sun hath not yet seen so bloody a vengeance as I will wreak!

Riche. Resolve nothing suddenly, sire. “For my part, I believe her Grace is innocent—till she is proved guilty.” These lovers, whomso they love, are in the Bastille. If your majesty will impose the task on me, I will probe all in turn, and detect the truth among their contradictions. “Do you commission me?”

King L. “I know your marvellous subtlety.”—I place my life, and more, my honour, in your hands.

Riche. Promise me only that you will neither see nor hear any of the parties, not even the Queen, until I bring my report.

King L. I swear!—But be speedy. Till then, I am on the rack.

Riche. Fear not, my Liege, I will on the instant to my task.
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

The Queen's apartment. QUEEN ANNE and HENRIETTE.

Queen A. Nay, I invented nothing. The plain truth served my occasion, and would most others who use lies; but men are ever wishing the sun to set that they may see gauds twinkle of their own device.

Princess H. But Stuart—both are lost!

Queen A. Not so far but that the hangman may find them.—Yet in sooth, our jest is something too serious on these gentlemen.

Princess H. But you do not—you cannot desert them.

Queen A. Nay, witty as I am, I am wise enough to know when to leave a friend.

Princess H. I am ready for either fate; but life or death, I will share it with Stuart.

Queen A. I am not so passionate admirer of a dungeon, and musty bread and water. But as Le Dragon's lovers, the Cardinal will not care to be at the expense of their keep.

Enter RICHELIEU.

Riche. Pardon me, Madame, that I enter unheralded;—my business is peremptory.

Queen A. The Cardinal Richelieu's presence always pleads its own excuse.—Your purpose?—

Riche. Its brief, Madam, but it needs no witnesses.

Princess H. I go. (*Exit.*)

Queen A. Henriette!

Riche. If you recall her, Madam, our conference is at an end, and your lover's fate is sealed.

Queen A. My lover!

Riche. Yes, madam, does the *word* alarm you?—Tut, it is useless to dissemble when we can no longer deceive. Queen of France! on my breath depend your crown,—your honour,—your life!

Queen A. On your breath!

Riche. I alone stand between you and a mighty rush of ills which, if I step aside, will crush you as an avalanche the snow-lily at its base!

Queen A. The Queen of France in the power of Richelieu? There is no lower step in destiny.

Riche. Yes, to the dungeon!

Queen A. Come innocence with me, and I will descend lower yet!

Riche. Innocence! I tell you all has been discovered. Le Dragon's accusation has been heard. She swears she detected you, not you her! The King is in doubt which to believe. I am appointed to examine,—to decide. I have examined; I have decided. Your lover has been searched;—know you this rose?—this jewelled rose, wrought by a cunning artificer, which the King gave you on the day of the masked ball! Be calm; I alone know of this proof, I alone can dispel the suspicions against you, or fix them firm as the Appennines.

Queen A. Be generous then, and just at once; restore me that rose, release your prisoners, and win the gratitude of a Queen.

Riche. Talk not to me of the gratitude of a Queen; there is but one bribe can buy me. Thy lover's place, lady, must be mine, "or his must change,—I hope, in Christian forgiveness,—to a better."

Queen A. His place! ay, if you mean in the Bastille; else no—though it be death to say so.

Riche. It is death, dishonour, eternal shame!

Queen A. Traitor! ingrate! hence, be gone!

Riche. Madam, I obey.

Queen A. Richelieu, stay. Have you no mercy? Whither go you with that livid smile?

Riche. Allow me to obey your Majesty's commands.

Queen A. Answer me! Why are you silent?

Riche. I never interrupt a lady.

Queen A. Whither—whither?

Riche. Your Grace sees this parchment? It is a blank. I thought to fill it with an order of release to my prisoners in the Bastille. You will not have it so. It has become a death-warrant!—in one hour from this moment your paramour expiates his crime on the block.

Queen A. But he is perfectly innocent; dreams not he has seen me, but on those occasions when you were present!—when I detected Le Dragon!

Riche. He hath the better chance of heaven, then; that is all.

Queen A. Have you a heart, Richelieu?

Riche. What else hath made me the slave of a barbarous beauty?—and the master of France!

Queen A. Richelieu!

Riche. (*takes a pen.*) Dictate, madam; an order of release or of death?

Queen A. What you will; I care not. But, traitor, you dare not! England will demand him of you; yea, reach you even in your slaughter house of Paris!

Riche. We feed oxen with hay while we aim the axe. Pronounce!

Queen A. Cardinal! were it not to seal thine own perdition!

Riche. The risk is mine.

Queen A. That is temptation, truly! Oh, that the sun of a king's favour should bring forth such serpents!

Riche. Very well; we have written death-warrants, and know the forms. (*Writes.*)

Queen A. Must he needs perish, for a wild jest! Were it not possible to outplay this gamester? Hold, Richelieu; release them. I consent.

Riche. (throwing the paper). I guessed the result of your meditations, madam; this paper sets them at liberty.

Queen A. Both?

Riche. Both. But think not to deceive me; this releases them from the Bastille, but not from Paris, which they cannot quit without an order under my hand. Your generosity will decide whether to-morrow they are seized for ever, or released for the same timeless time.

Queen A. Leave me then a moment to think, dear Cardinal. But let us part friends. Here is my hand. (*He kneels and kisses it.*) "Do not eat it, sir! And now, farewell; I will be generous like many who are called so—with other people's goods."

Riche. I quit paradise; but not without the hope of return.

(*Exit.*)

Queen A. I will reflect, dear Cardinal, and if there be wit in woman, I will moreover discomfit you. Ah, if I tangle not this snake in his own windings!

Enter HENRIETTE.

Princess H. Dearest sister! his life—mine—but though I would give my life to save it; yet, yet you are my brother's wife.

Queen A. Never fear, I shall forget it. I see you have heard all. The cardinal has set snares for pigeons. Have a care, Richelieu, you catch not a vulture to pick your eyes out! Come, look over me; watch what I write.

Princess H. Alas! an invitation to Richelieu, in private, and to come in disguise of a Dominican monk.

Queen A. His eminence will understand that his own way. But how do you stare at this?

Princess H. What, the chevaliers! to the same feast, at the same hour! and signed Daybreak and Noonday?

Queen A. So they likened our complexions!

Princess H. But will the terrible Richelieu—

Queen A. The terrible Richelieu would be ruined by a discovery, as well as we! Do you understand? But what for a messenger?

Princess. H. Mignon, your faithful page, waits within.

Queen A. Farewell then awhile, dearest! be punctual to the instant; but droop not your head so lilylike. The sun will break again, and turn all these tears to diamonds!—What fear you?

Princess H. It is not fear, it is regret!

Queen A. It is permitted you to regret . . . that is some consolation! My heart fails not, and 'tis not so firmly set in its casings as yours.

Princess H. Mine will be firm when I need it . . . as yours, sweet sister!

Queen A. The Cardinal comes alone. These young men shall learn our rank and their own danger at once; then, if they have not valour to force a passport from him, let them stay and be hanged—that is all!

(*Exeunt QUEEN and HENRIETTE.*)

SCENE III.

Antechamber.—Enter MADAME LE DRAGON, hastily.

Le Drag. The prisoners dismissed! I have but one resource—to throw myself on her mercy. Mignon!

Enter MIGNON.

Mig. (hiding a letter.) Ah, if she should see it! Well, Madam Countess?

Le Drag. Do you too desert me?

Mig. I always like to be in the fashion.

Le Drag. On my knees, dear child, I implore thee—

Mig. 'Tis of no use, you are out of favour, and were you an angel, that's enough. Go home and be miserable.

Le Drag. (aside.) A letter?—I am preparing to go into exile. But there is the hawk I have so long promised you—will you come and take it?

Mig. No . . . no . . . I must not.

Le Drag. Then must I have it strangled, and 'tis pity; dark plumed, with a blue bending neck, white tuft, a black eager eye, white in the pendants, with talons of azure mail!

Mig. I'll come for it the moment I have delivered my letter.

Le Drag. Now or never!

Mig. Is it peregrine or haggard?

Le Drag. What know I of the sorts? But 'tis close at hand, in my chamber.

Mig. Make haste then. But 'tis wrong of me. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV.

The King's Oratory.—The KING and LE DRAGON.

Le Drag. Sire! Alas, hath nature yielded to the violence of his anguish? His face is agonized as a man's tormented with some deadly poison. My King!

King L. Woman—devil! but that's the same.

Le Drag. My Liege, how have I offended you? I have told you but the truth.

King L. The truth! ay, the truth, the truth, they call it! The light which breaks in upon the faded feast of life, and shows that all its beauty, its pomps, its flowers, are but painted, faded mockeries! Leave me, scorpion! What more? the sting is in my heart. Let it rankle there! Oh, woman! most fair, most false illusion! what are all thy charms? Violets to hide a nest of vipers!

Le Drag. My sovereign!

King L. Away! I hate thee and all thy sex! Le Dragon, I did never believe your accusations until now; but this withering scroll! "Henceforth, for thy sake, I will believe that when a woman is too old to sin, she may be virtuous; and faithful, if you bribe higher by a sous than your enemy."

Le Drag. "Would I had been faithless, since your Highness prefers ignorance of your wrongs." Sire, there yet remains to you the exquisite pleasure of the injured—revenge!

King L. Revenge! Oh, there is music in that word! Revenge! Yea, I will make a heap at which Nero's self would fear to gaze! But, traitress, thou hast forged these lines which sear mine eyes out. Thou hast bribed the fiend to imitate her hand. These lovers are in the Bastille!

Le Drag. My Liege, they have been discharged by order of the Cardinal.

King L. The Cardinal! He, too, of the conspiracy! "Would they murder me in my own palace? Would the Cardinal be king in name, as he has long been in deed?" Ho! my guards, my guards!

Le Drag. Sire, be calm!

King L. When I am dead, when I am dead—but living never, never more! "Oh, wasps, ye can but buzz around the couch of death, not break his marbled rest!" Tut, tut; the page is still a prisoner?

Le Drag. In my chamber, Sire; whither I lured him, and then rifled him.

King L. Keep him there. Meanwhile, send this letter to its destination.

Le Drag. Your Majesty will be composed?

King L. Yea, I will come upon them like the lightning from a calm sky. Full of dew and freshness, will I snap her on the stalk! My whole court, the English ambassador, all shall behold my vengeance!

Le Drag. But, Sire, let no man know your intentions. The Cardinal is, I fear, of the plot. And the slightest noise alarms the keen sense of guilt!

King L. Experience teaches thee well; fear not. This dagger, seest thou? I will never sheathe it again but in the traitor's heart. And now, farewell. Leave me till the hour comes. No more;—begone! (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE V.

The Queen's apartment. QUEEN ANNE and the PRINCESS HENRIETTE.

Queen A. And now go, dear Henriette; you know your part; my holy lover will be here anon. Methinks I am dressed passably to please him, ch? What a pleasure 'tis to cheat the cheater; to foil a man at his own weapons!

Princess H. Steps! Hist, here he comes. (*Exit.*)

Queen A. Well, to be virtuous and young hath some excuse, were it but for the rarity; but to be vicious and old, is to be at once sour and musty; too much for any palate. Who is there? Speak low as love in a revelry.

Riche. (*without.*) 'Tis I—I!

Queen A. Truly, that melodious voice betrays you as her song the nightingale. Come in: softly, softly.

Riche. As snow on snow. (*Enters, disguised as a monk.*) Royal beauty! behold at your feet the humblest of your worshipers!

Queen A. Rise, Cardinal, rise. "Methinks you were not consecrated to such a worship."

Riche. Man is the high priest of Nature, and is not woman her divinest work?

Queen A. Not so loud! remember where you are.

Riche. In Paradise! The air you breathe is faint with perfume, like violets in a hot sun; the light is tinged with roses, and burns languidly as if enamoured of the beauty it reveals.

Queen A. Richelieu, they have spoiled a good poet in you. Be seated, I would parley with you.

Riche. Ah, lady, it is too late when the enemy is in the citadal, What magic is this you use, that in your presence the soul seems to swim in seas of delight, or sinks in ineffable depths of misery?—But are you sure we have no witnesses?

Queen A. Only one!—but one whom we can neither bribe nor slay—who comes unbidden to the couch—to the feast—past the spears of a thousand men-at-arms—whispering his irksome tale—Conscience!

Riche. 'Tis but a coward's shadow, that frightens himself; we, who live in the blaze of a throne, are shadowless! But this is idle talk. Call Richelieu, Villiers, and love him so.

Queen A. Call a crab-apple a peach, and it shall not eat less sour, Cardinal. Would you were virtuous! Yet we are all human. You have a subtle tongue—but I see not that logic smoothen wrinkles.

Riche. "This witching hour was made for love, not vain disputes. Thou art mine!" I have played at dice with fate for thee, and won the game, and but demand the stakes.

Queen A. "Unhand me, sir! Think you I am to be wooed thus?" Tell me but this, Cardinal—had I not seemed to you guilty in this matter of the Dolphins' Fountain, had your courage ever risen to this pass?

Riche. No, my sweet Queen; but snow once sullied—

Queen A. It matters not if you drive a herd of wild boar over it? But if I convince you of my innocence—

Riche. I swear to you, madam, I would ever regard you as unassailable as the pearly flames on the altar of Vesta. Ha! ha!

Queen A. I take you at the word. (*Music behind scenes.*) What deem you that to be?

Riche. 'Tis but . . . but . . . the coinage of your fears.

Queen A. I am not afraid. To say truth 'tis but to announce that the supper is ready to which I invited you, and to which I have also summoned a little society to meet you.

Riche. Supper—society—to meet me! If you have betrayed me, madam, remember, I am Richelieu!

Queen A. You have betrayed yourself, not I. Your subtle policy left me but one chance of saving these chevaliers and my honour. Too much to pay for a madcap jest!

Riche. Fool,—fool, to trust a woman! Beware, beware—

Queen A. I shall not forget I have caught a tiger.

Riche. Madam, if the King—if my enemies are there—I would implore—

Queen A. No, no, we are all incognito; and if you will, you may play your part so too. “Judge now whether I am guilty.” Within there! the guest has arrived.

Music; doors open. A Saloon, richly prepared for a Feast.

Enter PRINCESS HENRIETTE, masked, followed by CHARLES and BUCKINGHAM.

Prince C. How far wilt thou lead us, sylph in mask?

Princess H. No farther: Do you not know me, sir? (*un-masks.*)

Prince C. Exquisite Noonday!

Buck. But where is rosy Daybreak?—Divinest, (*advances*) dearest loveliness! do we meet again, when I had lost all hope, and at your summons? Am I pardoned, and is there indeed a fearful old dowager?

Queen A. Peace, Villiers, this is the funeral feast of our folly—After which we shall never meet again; “would that we never had!”

Buck. So say not I, though death conclude the tale.

Riche. “Sir, the lady is wedded; in my presence I must not suffer such discourse.”

Prince C. But this sweet vestal blossom, which the sun has scarcely lured from the bud, is mine wholly.

Riche. Thine? Ha, ha, a pleasant dream.

Buck. If this be a dream, oh, may I never wake.

Riche. Life is but a dream, and death the waking! Some dream of glory, and the cold laurel wreathes their aching brows; some of riches, and the yellow gold lies piled in glistening heaps; some of power, and the sceptre or the sword gall their hands; some of love, and the thorny roses bind their hot temples! but lo ye now, the harsh step of death is heard, and the dream is over.

Buck. (Aside.) What doth this sage proverbialist here? He is as tedious as a grandame that will not to bed when we would be roasting chestnuts. But, dearest Lady, you promised us tidings for what strange reason we were imprisoned, and then so suddenly liberated?

Queen A. You shall hear anon; but we will part cheerfully. I drink to your fair health, sirs; sister, yours.

Buck. I return your pledge, bright star of love, "and drink it on my knees."

Queen A. "Arise, Villiers; this is folly, madness!" The star of love, luckless at best, is to us—nay, to thee, most fortuneless, since it has led to the brink of a precipice.

Riche. You will slip over it, madam!

Queen A. It may be, but I will drag some weeds with me.

Buck. Speak not of separation, dearest, for I will never leave thee. Henceforth I am as much a portion of thy society as its fragrance of the rose.

Queen A. Nay, nay. But the sunset of our acquaintance grows dewy with tears; I have learned like a froward child, a painful wisdom! I see 'tis not enough to be innocent to scape men's slander—we must also be prudent. Henceforth—but 'tis time to end the farce. Messieurs, Villiers, I am the Queen of France.

Buck. The Queen of France!

Riche. And you, Monsieur Stuart, whose ambition hath such mounting wings, do you deem yourself a fitting match for the daughter of Henry the Great?

Princess H. "Yes, Stuart, I am Henriette Marie. Here is my hand, never to be yours, but never anothers."

Prince C. Henriette Marie! Sublime creature! could you indeed deign to love me, a poor unknown stranger?

Princess H. Better than rank, riches, power—better than life!

Riche You look like your own ghost, Mousieur Villiers!

Buck. Sovereign lady, on my knees, in the lowliest terms—

Queen A. No more; I forgive you every thing. We have no time to waste. An hour's delay in Paris is destruction. You cannot leave it without a passport from Cardinal Richelieu. This Dominican is he.

Riche. (*throws off disguise.*) Yes, gentlemen, I am Richelieu—foiled for once—deservedly foiled. Lay not your hands on your swords; you need them not. I myself never use force where reason will do, and am vanquished at my own weapons. Give me the paper; I will sign your passports. I recognise your innocence, madam; and as nothing but the idea of—of the contrary, encouraged my presumption, henceforth, it is level with the dust, from which it ought never to have risen.

Enter MIGNON.

Mig. My Queen!—oh, sirs, fly, jump out of the windows! All is lost! the apartments are surrounded! The King and his guards are coming like raging madmen, to butcher everybody!

Riche. Eh, child, what mean you?

Mig. I have but just escaped from Le Dragon's chamber, out of the window, dropping from branch to branch of a mulberry-tree!

LE DRAGON without.

Le Drag. Open the door; it is the King.

King L. (*without,*) Burst it open, guards, "Traitress, thy sun is set!"

Queen A. Richelieu, you alone can save us! Do so, or share our destruction!

Riche Fear nothing; what should innocence fear? Ho, without! What brawlers are ye, mad or drunk?

Doors burst open. Enter the KING, LE DRAGON, and GUARD.

King L. Die faithless woman!—die, villanous betrayers! "Down with all; spare none."

RICHELIEU throws himself before the guards.

Riche. Cease, ye bloodthirsty madmen, cease! 'Tis I, Richelieu, command ye! My King, my son, is it possible? "Are you the leader of these raging wolves?"

King L. Richelieu!

Riche. Yes, Richelieu, sire! He whom you commissioned to examine into the truth or falsehood of this egregious duenna's accusation. King of France, the Queen is innocent! more innocent than myself.

King L. Then darkness is light; read here!—'Tis a faithful copy.

Riche. An invitation to these gentlemen, in these apartments, at this hour?—The proof of her innocence!—Behold, sire! (*produces another letter.*) Her Grace invited me, at the same place and moment, in the disguise I have but this moment relinquished, and I attest that neither of these strangers had more suspicion they beheld the Queen of France than blind men of the glory of the sun!

King L. But the assignation at the Dolphins' Fountain?

Riche. Whose writing and whose signature are these found on this cavalier in the Bastille, accepting it?

King L. Le Dragon's!—

Riche. And that sh^oept it we can all witness!—Your Majesty?

Queen A. I have already told the jest.

Riche. The Princess?

Princess H. I witnessed it—and could laugh now at the remembrance, were it a merrier season.

Riche. Thou, page?

Mig. With my sword against gainsayers!—but that 'tis too rusty to draw.

Riche. You, cavaliers?

Buck. I never betray a lady's goodness—especially when so excessive!

Riche. And I myself, for I met her flying in disorder, and found those whom she so traitorously accused, nestling like doves in the bower.

Le Drag. I own it!—I confess all!—On my knees, mercy, my sovereigns!—I own my offence and my royal lady's innocence.

King L. My wife!—can you forgive me?

Queen A. O, Louis, your goodness fills my soul with regret at my folly!—Forgive me, too; and never again shall you find the shadow of complaint in me.

King L. And yet . . . if they but knew ye, wife and sister, from dancing at a ball, wherefore should these strangers accept an invitation into our palace, at this unseasoned hour?

Prince C. I would have dared to enter a den of lions, sire, in the hope of seeing again this royal and beautiful lady—for I trust I have not so far misplaced my love as Villiers his dotage . . . since in the presence of his eminence, she has sworn to be no man's wife if not mine!

King L. Thy wife!—my sister!—Cardinal, are we awake?

Riche. I scarcely know!—sir, of whom speak you?

Prince C. Of the Princess Henriette Marie!

King L. And who are you, who, being mad, would scale the stars?

Prince C. One, I trust, in rank, no unfit match—Charles Prince of Wales.

Omnes. Prince of Wales!

Buck. Son of King James of England, Scotland, and Ireland! Long may they flourish under such gentle mastery!

Lord H. (*behind the scenes*) Haste—help—save him!—It is the heir of three realms! (*Enters.*) O, my Prince, my Prince, into what danger—

Prince C. Hist, hist, I am in none,—if this lady can love the Prince as she has loved the knight errant?

King L. If this be so, why, Cardinal, do we not well? Royal brother, she is yours.

Riche. Chance is a better politician than Richelieu!

Le Drag. O, my sweet lady, my gracious liege, plead for me!

King L. Begone!

Queen A. Nay, let us not be harsh, Louis! Grant me a boon—the pardon of Le Dragon.

King L. 'Tis granted...but henceforth she is banished from our court.

Le Drag. O, my lord ambassador, how could you join in the plot against me?

Lord H. I, madam!

Le Drag. It was to meet you I went!

Buck. O, my Lord of Cherbury!

Lord H. Duke of Buckingham!

Queen A. Duke of Buckingham!

Buck. The humblest servant of your majesty . . . at your feet.

(*Kneels.*)

Riche. Soh!—all is light again, and our shadows have been but thunderclouds that drift over a vineyard reeling with the purple grape! Love in marriage (*to Charles and Princess*) should be as sweet and as ripe, and, being expressed by time, yield but a mellower and richer juice! So be it with you, royal pair!

Buck. A goodly homily!—whereto add, my Lord Cardinal, that thus the *old fox being trapped*—

Queen A. And doomed still to cry—*Sour Grapes!*

Riche. What though? Philosophy hath her consolations, lenten cheer though they be! . . . as . . . *woman can never grant what she can deny* . . . or we should have as many sighing husbands as lovers!—Let hopeless lovers so comfort them . . . my Lord of Buckingham! For me remains—**THE TRIUMPH OF MY POLICY!**

Queen A. The triumph of . . . *your* policy, Cardinal? . . . Ha, ha! it must have been double indeed to meet at contrary ends!

Riche. Have we not effected this match?—Learn, that with us, who are directors on the world's great theatre—*success* being always the aim and drift of our policy—come how it may—'tis ours!—But with fair allowance (*to audience*) it may yet be achieved, in sense as well as sound, by

“RICHELIEU IN LOVE.”

THE END.

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